

Michael Henrik Wynn

“Deception”

Imagine traveling through space at lightening speed, exploring the deep recesses of the universe to unveil her deepest secrets. “Are we really alone?” is one of the most fundamental questions that future generations must explore. The questions really makes my heart beat. Somehow the notion of that grand future, of all those limitless possibilities, makes me relax, bringing balance to a boring life.

I am a social worker, you see, for a private company. I make rounds helping old people, geezers, hags and cripples. Perhaps they need something. Then I will provide it for them. I will even wipe their bottoms if they need it. Naturally, I often hate my job and like most people I sit on my couch and dream of becoming a millionaire or I get completely wasted and pretend to be one. Sometimes I feel as if I would care for anything or anyone provided the pay was satisfactory. Science Fiction writing is therefore a great passion of mine. When I write about the future, a world of possibilities and probabilities opens up to me and I can mold it into a format I can accept. I will become the next Arthur C. Clark. In the meantime, I will, for a modest fee, remove your excrement and make your bed.

In January a few years back, I was given a new patient to take care of, a certain Mrs. Jackson whose husband had died suddenly in a horrible accident a few years earlier, leaving her all alone with failing memory. She lived in a nice house at the west end of town, with a patch of grass outside and a white fence to match. It would have been a paradise for someone healthy. What it was for Mrs. Jackson, I cannot say. She sat in a wheelchair as I entered, but I don’t think she was physically dependent upon it. When she saw me she was immediately disgusted. “Who are you?” she said. “I am Michael, your new social worker? Don’t you remember?”

“No. Will you be taking care of me?”

“Yes.”

“Well you damn well better. Crazy old cow like me, sitting here all alone!” I soon found out that Mrs. Jackson had many needs that needed

to be fulfilled. She had a schedule to keep and if it was not kept to the letter, she would become hysterical and utter words I have never heard from people her age. Other times—I think this was in one of her better periods—she would get flashes of clarity and her eyes would gleam of doom and tragedy. “I am so lonely,” she would say. One day she was looking for her glasses in the living room. “Michael! Michael Michael” she shouted as she paced across the room. I ran down the stairs from the upstairs bedroom where I was making the bed, thinking that she had suffered some form of injury. When I arrived she said “I cannot find my glasses. I know they are here. Perhaps they have taken them from me?”

“Who?” I replied.

“Don’t get funny with me! You know very well who I am talking about. Anyway it’s 3 o’clock and you haven’t finished the bedroom yet. That means that you will be late for cleaning the kitchen at 4 like we normally do. I always have the kitchen cleaned at 4. Why can’t I find my glasses,” she said as she sunk down in her chair. I could see now that she was crying. I was about to go to her side, but something held me back. Then she made it easy for me as she said “Go away!”.

“I know what I want,” the old woman said. “I want to be human. You all want me dead. That is what you really want. Actually, if you are going to continue with that sort of attitude, I don’t see how we can work together. I honestly don’t. Where are my glasses? I want my glasses, damn it”

The old woman had turned mean on me. Her face was stone cold, even her wrinkles seemed inanimate. I studied her expressions, but I could not find a hint of compromise. “Do you want me to leave, Mrs. Jackson?”

“Yes”

I sighed and gathered my things. As I was leaving, I heard her shout after me: “And don’t bother coming back”. The next day I returned to have the matter settled. I expected that she simply didn’t like me and that she would prefer to have someone else in her house, perhaps a woman. Surprisingly she seemed cheerful in her chair by the window. She greeted me and smiled. I sat down, began politely by saying that I understood her situation, that it was her choice and that I was willing to have the company find a replacement within the month. She looked

at me and laughed “My dear, what are you rambling about?”

“Don’t you remember that you shouted at me and called me a liar?”

“No”

“You said I had a bad attitude.”

“My dear young man, I have never seen you before in my life. I bear grudges to no-one, especially not a complete stranger such as yourself. Now be a dear sweetheart and give my pills, will you.”

At first, I thought she was playing with me, but her act seemed so natural and her expression so innocent that I rejected the idea.

“Mrs. Jackson, do you remember my name?”

“John?”

“No, it’s Michael.”

“Such a nice name too,” she said and touched my hand. I now began to wonder what she really remembered from our past encounter. What did it matter what I did, if she would never remember it. Normally I bring some cake every Friday to my patients, but in view of recent events it seemed a waste of time. She always asked me if we had cake on Friday, and having assumed that she simply needed to have the obvious confirmed; I thought she remembered. From that day on I brought no more cake on Fridays. Certainly there was no reason to bring the actual cake. When she asked me if we had cake, I told her we had and she was just as happy as if she actually had. Pretty soon other changes occurred. I no longer needed to follow her stringent rules. She would always ask me if I had done the kitchen at 4 o’clock like she wanted it done, and I replied yes, and that was that. I had no qualms about what I was doing because it meant nothing to her now. I started wondering whether there was even any need for kindness. I thought I could insult her one day and come back the next as if nothing happened. But, such deliberate cruelty was beyond even me. Things were bad enough. There was no need to rub it in. The situation with Mrs. Jackson soon started to depress me. Somehow I blamed her for her effect on me, and I am afraid I at times was not as polite to her as she deserved. Seeing her sit there, asking me every time who I was and what I was doing there, got to me in a way that I didn’t understand. It was as if I saw in her my own situation magnified.

I began searching for something to do, something that could take my

mind of the job. I found it in a newspaper ad. A local writer was organizing a course in creative writing. But it was too expensive for me, a 1000 dollars. The opportunity that presented itself to me at the end of May that year now fills me with shame, although there are parts of me that think I deserved something as compensation for the way she made me feel. Mrs. Jackson's failing memory had brought more of her practical affairs to my attention. When there was something that needed to be fixed, local taxes or gas bills, I stepped in to pay them for her. Naturally she had given me all her papers and permission to withdraw any amount from the bank. Legally she was in need of a guardian, and in the absence of any relatives, the system left those tasks temporarily to me. I now realized that Mrs. Jackson was a very rich woman. In fact, I was told that she owned as much as a million, and that there was no-one to inherit the money. In fact, the money would probably be donated to charity when she died, or even worse, it would be confiscated by the government. A 1000 dollars to her was nothing. It was a drop in the ocean. I would get my writing class, and then I would be a better nurse for her. She might actually want that. Surely, in the end this was something that I did for her too, seeing that she was helpless and needed constant assistance from strangers. It was a tip. Yes, that's what it was. The next day I withdrew the 1000 dollars from her account and enrolled in the writing class.

I was very excited at first. I never thought that I would have any kind of talent for writing. I never compared myself to great writers, but I thought that I might actually be able to write for the mass market rather than for the sophisticated critic, who it was impossible to please anyway. The classes took place every Friday at some shabby downtown haunt. Unfortunately the classes took place at the same time as my Friday appointments with Mrs. Jackson, but I discovered that if I arrived 2 hours later and stayed a few minutes longer, she would never even notice that I was gone. There were about 10 of us and our teacher was just as eccentric as I hoped he would be. Everybody knows that anyone who tries to teach writing to others must be certifiably insane. He was a tall skinny character with bushy hair and a wild staring gaze. Apparently he had published some novels himself, although I had never heard of any of them. There were several people who considered themselves artists in the true sense of the word. They quoted Russian novelists and spoke of literary theory with great insight. Naturally, none of them had ever published anything and in my opinion they were all idiots. When I announced my intention to write about aliens for the

mass market, they said I was insincere.

“Don’t you know,” I said, “that the future is a very exciting subject? New developments in biotechnology will revolutionize our treatment of disease and new information technology will bring all the knowledge of the world into our living rooms. In the future, I believe, all humans will learn faster because they can take drugs to improve their memory. We will all become geniuses.”

“Interesting,” the teacher said, and stared at me with his crazy eyes. “Very interesting. What do the rest of you think, will there be a brave new world of tomorrow? Hm Hm Tell me.” His eyes searched the room for an opinion.

“Well, I think he is on to something,” a girl replied. “I can sort of see the sense of it”. She looked at me with deep brown eyes and smiled. I felt my heart skip a beat. I don’t get many smiles from women. Next time the class gathered, the teacher was late and I engaged her conversation. She was very pretty, too pretty for me actually. She had a quiet, subdued manner about her, she never looked straight at me. It occurred to me that she was painfully shy, even delicate.

“What do you do?” I said, “I mean when you are not writing”

“I’m a psychologist,” she said.

“Really,” I replied, “I am a social worker.”

We soon discovered that we had much in common. A few minutes later we talked about personal matters, things that we both seemed concerned about. She had some oddities though, but I easily forgave them considering how beautiful she was. For instance, she would always ask me if I thought she was fat, even though she was extremely skinny. When I told her that I thought she could well gain a few pounds, she gave me a very irritated look, as if I was lying to her. However, most of the time we talked about other things, such as the best Sci-Fi movies and who founded modern science fiction, Mary Shelley or H.G. Wells. Very soon I realized that I was in love with her.

This blessing was a tragedy in disguise. I could hardly work anymore without having all sorts of plans for our future in my head. Her face seemed to haunt me constantly, even when I worked with Mrs. Jackson. Once Mrs. Jackson eyed me suspiciously and said “Michael, are you in love?”

“Of course not,” I said. “Don’t be silly.”

After that I decided that I should not talk to her the rest of the week. After all, I could start talking to her in a week when I had calmed down and she wouldn’t remember a thing. That weekend Lisa and I went up to a cottage she had in the country. It was one of those perfect moments that are forever imprinted in your memory. We drove into her valley and we felt happy. The cottage lay on the bank of a slow-moving river that glittered where the landscape opened up into a wide-open space. I think I told myself that this was too good to be true, fearing that I could wake up at any moment. The following week we met regularly, and it goes without saying that I partly neglected my duties with Mrs. Jackson. However, she did not suffer any distress in the sense that her physical needs were ignored. She had food, her house was clean and she never complained. Lisa and I had now become intimate and I cherished the memory of her naked body, elegant and dexterous as it was. I could sit by myself and think about it for hours on end. Sometimes I would catch myself in red-handed apathy and on those occasions I would humor myself with the idea that the senile Mrs. Jackson and I after all were not much different, comfortably seated in our chairs, staring into oblivion. My writing classes were now drawing to a close. I think we had about a week left. To be honest I had not produced much. Lisa had found an expression for her obsession with dieting and produced the first draft of a book for overweight women. I had only produced the first draft of a story about time travel. Our teacher, however, now declared the course a complete success. Some day, he predicted, several people in our class would win the Nobel prize and then we would be grateful for the advice he had given. I think he was just making excuses for our obvious lack of talent, but I went along with it because I wanted to close on a good note.

Lisa and I had made plans for a travel to Europe. It was kind of a honeymoon for us. We wanted to travel in France and make love like they do in all the clichés. However, the journey was quite expensive. I had not told her any details about my financial situation. I barely got by on my present salary. The truth was that not only did I not make enough money to live in the dream world we wanted, my house was heavily mortgaged. I therefore asked for extra hours at work. I would stay with Mrs. Jackson the whole week and help her in any way I could. It would be much easier if she had one person to relate to instead of all the people that she had coming and going all week. Perhaps then she would

remember my name. I assured my employer that that would be very unlikely.

One day Mrs. Jackson came to me and asked me to get her some medicines from the pharmacy. They were very expensive, but she would give me the money like she usually did. I was surprised to find that she had large sums of cash stored in a box in her closet. She handed me a roll of notes, and as I held them in my hand, I could not help thinking what would happen if I took some of it. After all, I had done it before and gotten away with it. Was I stealing from her? She was wealthy and had no one to inherit her money. If I didn't take it, the money would simply go to waste. I decided to steal yet another time. On the way from the pharmacy the remaining notes found their way into my pocket. That evening I called Lisa and told her I had bought the tickets. She laughed and said we would have the time of our lives. I repeated that phrase over again as I fell asleep that night "the time of our lives".

As morning broke the next day I felt alive for the very first time. It was as if everything was clearer now. I noticed the slow movements of the morning mists and watched the dewdrops on the windowpane. I made my sandwich and prepared for my final day at the writing class. It was, ironically, Friday and we were having a cake baked by our mad teacher. I took the bus through the city as usual, but found that traffic was especially annoying this morning. Cars, streetlights and sirens seemed to conspire against us in a futile attempt to nag me. But nothing could touch me now. I got off the bus and made my way through the crowded park to the building and classroom. As I entered the classroom I found everyone in a strange, almost quiet mood. "Hi guys," I said defiantly, "guess what".

"Michael, you'd better sit down. Something has happened. Have you not heard about the accident? They are dead."

"What do you mean, 'They are dead?' Who is dead? When did they die?"

"This morning, in a car crash. Lisa and her sister."

"You are lying? They are not dead"

"Yes, they are, ask anyone. I looked at their faces and they all nodded

"But I have made plans. We are going to Europe. I have bought tickets. The worst thing about it is that I can't get a refund now. They don't give refunds on cheap tickets. It's funny really because I seldom travel. And I know they like traveling. Most people like traveling. It's not like I

am an astronaut or anything. Imagine going on a spaceship to the moon or something. I just like to see new things you see.”

They all gave me a strange look, my hands suddenly started shaking. I was unable to control them, so I stuffed them in my pockets. I began laughing at my own clumsiness. Those damned hands, I thought. “Well I have something to do,” I said, got up nodded reassuringly to them and left. I shall not bother you with the details of my sorrow. It is, after all, not much different from that which most people experience at some point in their lives. It took me about a month to compose myself. I then took up my job for Mrs. Jackson, who still sat in her chair by the window.

“Who are you?” she said as I entered. “I am your social worker. Michael is my name,” I said. “Don’t you remember?”

“No”

Aleister Crowley “The Vixen”

Patricia Fleming threw the reins to a groom, and ran up the steps into the great house, her thin lips white with rage. Lord Eyre followed her heavily. “I’ll be down in half an hour,” she laughed merrily, “tell Dawson to bring you a drink!” Then she went straight through the house, her girlish eyes the incarnation of a curse.

For the third time she had failed to bring Geoffrey Eyre to her feet. She looked into her hat; there in the lining was the talisman that she had tested—and it had tricked her. What do I need? she thought. Must it be blood?

She was a maiden of the pure English strain; brave, gay, honest, shrewd—and there was not one that guessed the inmost fire that burnt her. For she was but a child when the Visitor came.

The first of the Visits was in a dream. She woke choking; the air—clear, sweet, and wholesome as it blew through the open window from the Chilterns—was fouled with a musty stench. And she woke her governess with a tale of a tiger.

The second Visit was again at night. She had been hunting, was alone at the death, had beaten off the hounds. That night she heard a fox bark in her room. She spent a sleepless night of terror; in the morning she found the red hairs of a fox upon her pillow.

The third Visit was nor in sleep nor waking. But she tightened her lips, and would have veiled the hateful gleam in her eyes. It was that day, though, that she struck a servant with her riding-whip.

She was so sane that she knew exactly wherein her madness lay; and she set all her strength not to conquer but to conceal it.

Two years later, and Patricia Fleming, the orphan heiress of Carthwell Abbey, was the county toast, Diana of the Chilterns. Yet Geoffrey Eyre evaded her. His dog’s fidelity and honesty kept him true to the little north-country girl that three months earlier had seduced his simplicity. He did not even love her; but she had made him think so for an hour; and his pledged word held him.